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C O N F I D E N T I A L VILNIUS 000077

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [LH](#)
SUBJECT: (C) GOVERNMENT COALITION BECOMES A MAJORITY:
NEVERTHELESS, LITTLE CHANCE FOR CHANGE

REF: VILNIUS 024 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Ambassador John A. Cloud for reason 1.4 (d).

¶1. (C) Summary. Prime Minister Gediminas Kirkilas successfully brought the New Union (Social Liberal) Party into his governing coalition the week of January 28, giving him a majority in parliament for the first time since taking office. His bare majority (71 of 141 seats, plus the speaker) and the lack of discipline in the coalition, however, mean that he still will have trouble moving his own agenda forward. We expect that he will continue to avoid tackling controversial issues until parliamentary elections in October. End summary.

¶2. (U) PM Kirkilas, taking advantage of the vacancy caused by Environment Minister Arunas Kundrotas's resignation, convinced New Union Chairman Arturas Paulauskas to join the ruling coalition on January 28, and take up the Minister's seat. New Union's ten MPs will provide Kirkilas with a majority in the Seimas (parliament) for the first time since he became Prime Minister in July 2006.

¶3. (U) Paulauskas drove a hard bargain for his cooperation. In addition to the Minister's post, he has sought the chairs of the Seimas National Security and Defense, European Affairs, and Anticorruption Committees for his party. As of the conclusion of the fall session of parliament (February 1), however, none of those posts has been transferred to New Union, and there is no guarantee this will happen when the spring session begins in a few weeks. The current chair of the National Security and Defense Committee, Algimantas Matulevicius (a member of the coalition partner Civil Democracy Party), angrily offered his resignation during the negotiations, but this was rejected by the Seimas. In order to take the chair of the European Affairs Committee, New Union will have to unseat Andrius Kubilius, Deputy Speaker of the Seimas, and leader of its second largest bloc.

¶4. (U) The new coalition's frailty was almost immediately demonstrated by the January 31 vote on amendments to the Nuclear Power Plant law. The controversial amendments were strongly and publicly opposed by coalition partner Liberal and Center Union (LCU), nine of whose ten MPs voted against them. (Note: Ultimately the measures passed thanks to the votes of the opposition Labor Party.) LCU representatives later called for protests to be staged February 8 outside the Presidential Palace, to urge the President to veto the amendments.

Comment

¶5. (C) Achieving a majority will not help Kirkilas overcome some of the problems he has had to date in promoting his policies. He has spent the past eighteen months making deep compromises just to hold his minority coalition together. This has been especially true in his unwillingness to

confront the Liberal and Center Union over construction at the Jewish cemetery in Vilnius (reftel). The addition of another party, therefore, may be more of a detriment than a boost: it is one more party he will have to appease. Bringing in New Union also does nothing to help him solidify his grip on his own party. The Social Democrats voted uniformly in favor of the Nuclear Power Plant amendments -- something that is very dear to Kirkilas -- but he still has to work to maintain party discipline. As one example, Defense Minister Olekas has been flexing his muscles very publicly in the last six months, likely with the October elections in mind. We therefore see no reason to think that Kirkilas will be any bolder in pushing policies now, than he was with a minority coalition.

CLOUD